

HEERE BIGYNNETH THE MAUNCIPLES TALE OF THE CROWE.

AN Phebus dwelled
heere in this erthe a-
doun,
As olde bookes mak-
en mencoun,
He was the mooste
lusty bachiler
In al this world, and
eek the best archer.
He slow Phitoun, the

serpent, as he lay
Slepyng agayn the sonne upon a day;
And many another noble worthy dede
He with his bowe wroughte, as men may rede.
Oleyen he koude on every mynstralcie,
And syngen, that it was a melodie
To heeren of his cleere voys the soun.
Certes the kyng of Thebes, Amphion,
That with his syngyng walled that citee,
Koude nevere syngen half so wel as hee.
Cherto he was the semelieste man
That is or was, sith that the world bigan.
What nedeth it his fetures to discryve?
for in this world was noon so fair on lyve.
He was therwith fulfild of gentillesse,
Of honour, and of parfit worthynesse.
This Phebus, that was flour of bachilrie,
As wel in fredom as in chivalrie,
for his desport, in signe eek of victorie
Of Phitoun, so as telleth us the storie,
Was wont to beren in his hand a bowe.

Now hadde this Phebus in his hous a
crowe,
Which in a cage he fostred many a day,
And taughte it speken, as men teche a jay.
Whit was this crowe as is a snow-whit swan,
And countrefete the speche of every man
He koude, whan he sholde telle a tale.
Therwith in al this world no nyghtyngale
Ne koude, by an hondred thousand deel,
Syngen so wonder myrily and weel.

Now hadde this Phebus in his hous a wyf,
Which that he lovede moore than his lyf,
And nyght and day dide evere his diligence
Hir for to plesse, and doon hire reverence;
Save oonly, if the sothe that I shal sayn,
Jalous he was, and wolde have kept hire fayn;
for hym were looth byjaped for to be.
And so is every wight in swich degree;
But al in ydel, for it availleth noght.

A good wyf, that is elene of werk and thought,
Sholde nat been kept in noon awayt, certayn;
And trewely, the labour is in vayn
To kepe a shrewe, for it wol nat bee.
This holde I for a verray nycetee,
To spille labour for to kepe wyves;
Thus writen olde clerkes in hir tyves.
But now to purpos, as I first bigan:
This worthy Phebus dooth al that he kan

To plesen hire, wenyng that swich plesaunce
And for his manhede and his governaunce,
That no man sholde han put hym from hire
grace.
But God it woot, ther may no man embrace
As to destreyne a thyng, which that nature
Hath naturelly set in a creature.

As Taak any bryd, and put it in a cage,
And do al thyn entente and thy corage
To fostre it tendrely with mete and drynke
Of alle deyntees that thou kanst bithynke,
And keep it also clenly as thou may;
Although his cage of gold be never so gay,
Yet hath this brid, by twenty thousand foold,
Levere in a forest, that is rude and coold,
Goon etc wormes and swich wretchednesse,
for evere this brid wol doon his bisynesse
To escape out of his cage, if he may;
His libertee this brid desireth ay.

Lat take a cat, & fostre hym wel with milk
And tendre flesch, & make his couche of silk,
And lat hym seen a mous go by the wal;
Anon he weyveth milk, and flesch, and al,
And every deyntee that is in that hous,
Swich appetit hath he to ete a mous.
Lo, heere hath lust his dominacioun,
And appetit fleemeth discrecioun.

As she wolf hath also a vileyns kynde;
The lewdeste wolf that she may fynde,
Or leest of reputacioun, wol she take
In tyme whan hir lust to han a make.

Amen
That been untrew, and nothyng by
wommen.
for men han evere a likerous appetit
On lower thyng to parfoune hir delit
Than on hire wyves, be they never so faire,
Ne never so trewe, ne so debonaire.
flesch is so newefangel, with meschaunce,
That we ne konne in nothyng han plesaunce
That sowneth into vertu any while.

This Phebus, which that thoghte
Upon no gile,
Deceyved was, for al his jolitee;
for under hym another hadde shee,
A man of litel reputacioun,
Nat worth to Phebus in comparisoun.
The moore harm is; it happeth ofte so,
Of which ther cometh muchel harm and wo.

And so bifel, whan Phebus was absent,
His wyf anon hath for hir lemman sent.
Hir lemman? certes, this is a knavish speche
for evereth it me, and that I yow bisceche.
The wise Plato seith, as ye may rede,
The word moot nede accorde with the dede.
If men shal telle proprely a thyng,
The word moot cosyn be to the werkynge.
I am a boystous man; right thus seye I,

Ther nys no difference, trewely
Bitwixe a wyf that is of heigh degree,
If of hire body dishoneste she be,
And a poure wenche, oother than this,
If it so be, they werke bothe amys,
But that the gentile, in hire staat above,
She shal be cleped his lady, as in love;
She shal be cleped oother is a poure womman,
And for that oother is a poure lemman.
She shal be cleped his wenche, or his lemman.
And, God it woot, myn owene deere brother,
Men teyn that oon as lowe as lith that oother.
Right so, bitwixe a titleles tiraunt
And an outlawe, or a thief erraunt,
The same I seye, ther is no difference.

As Alisaundre toold was this sentence;
That, for the tiraunt is of gretter myght,
By force of meynce for to sleen dounright,
And brennen hous and hoom, and make al playn,
Lo, therfore is he cleped a capitayn;
And, for the outlawe hath but smal meynce,
And may nat doon so greet an harm as he,
Ne bryng a contree to so greet mescheef,
Men clepen hym an outlawe or a thief.
But, for I am a man noght textuel,
I wol noght telle of textes never a deel;
I wol go to my tale, as I bigan.

AN Phebus wyf had sent for hir
lemman,
Anon they wroghten al hire lust volage.
The white crowe, that heeng ay in the cage,
Biheeld hire werk, and seyde never a word.
And whan that hoom was come Phebus, the lord,
This crowe sang Cokkow! cokkow! cokkow!
What, bryd? quod Phebus, what song
syngestow?

Ne were thou wont so myrily to synge
That to myn herte it was a rejoyssynge
To heere thy voys? Alas! what song is this?
By God! quod he, I synge nat amys.
Phebus, quod he, for al thy worthynesse,
for al thy beautee and thy gentillesse,
for al thy song and al thy mynstralcye,
for al thy waityng, blered is thyn eye
With oon of litel reputacioun,
Noght worth to thee, as in comparisoun,
The montance of a gnat; so moote I thryve!
for on thy bed thy wyf I saugh hym swyve.
What wol ye moore? The crowe anon hym
tolde

By sadde tokenes and by wordes bolde,
How that his wyf had doon hire lecherye,
Hym to greet shame and to greet vileynye;
And tolde hym ofte, he saugh it with his eyen.
This Phebus gan awayward for to wryen,
And thoughte his sorweful herte brast
atwo;

His bowe he bente, and sette therinne a flo,
And in his ire his wyf thanne hath he slayn.
This is the effect, ther is namoore to sayn;
for sorwe of which he brak his mynstralcie,
Bothe harpe, and lute, and gyterne, and sautrie;
And eek he brak his arwes and his bowe,
And after that, thus spak he to the crowe:

TRAITOUR, quod he, with tonge of scor-
pioun,
Thou hast me broght to my confusoun!

Alas! that I was wrought! why nere I deed?
O deere wyf! O gemme of lustiheed!
That were to me so sad and eek so trewe,
Now listow deed, with face pale of hewe,
ful gilteles, that dorste I swere, ywys!
O rakel hand! to doon so foule amys!
O trouble wit! O ire recchelees!
That unavyssed smytest gilteles!
O wantrust! ful of fals suspicioun,
Where was thy wit and thy discrecioun?
O every man, bewar of rakelnesse,
Ne trowe nothyng withouten strong witesse.
Smyt nat to soone, er that ye witen why,
And beeth avysed wel and sobrelly,
Er ye doon any execucioun
Upon youre ire, for suspicioun.

Alas! a thousand folk hath rakel ire
fully fordoon, and broght hem in the mire.
Alas! for sorwe I wol myselven slee!
And to the crowe, O false thief! seyde he,
I wol thee quite anon thy false tale!
Thou songe whilom lyk a nyghtyngale;
Now shaltow, false thief, thy song forgon,
And eek thy white fetheres everichon,
Ne nevere in al thy lif ne shaltow speke.
Thus shal men on a traytour been awreke;
Thou and thyn ofspryng evere shul be blake,
Ne nevere sweete noyse shul ye make,
But evere crie agayn tempest and rayn,
In tokenyng that thurgh thee my wyf is slayn.
And to the crowe he sturte, and that anon,
And pulled his white fetheres everichon,
And made hym blak, and refte hym al his song,
And eek his speche, and out at dore hym slong
Unto the devel, which I hym bitake;
And for this caas been alle crows blake.

FORDYNGES, by this ensample I yow
preye,

Beth war, and taketh kepe what I seye;
Ne telleth nevere no man in youre lyf
How that another man hath dight his wyf;
He wol yow haten mortally, certeyn.
Daun Salomon, as wise clerkes seyn,
Techeth a man to kepen his tonge weel;
But as I seyde, I am noght textuel.
But nathelees, thus taughte me my dame:
My sone, thenk on the crowe, a Goddes name;
My sone, keep wel thy tonge and keep thy freend.
A wikked tonge is worse than a feend.
My sone, from a feend men may hem blesse;
My sone, God of his endeles goodnesse
Walled a tonge with teeth and lippes eke,
for man sholde hym avyse what he speke;
My sone, ful ofte, for to muche speche,
hath many a man been spilt, as clerkes teche;
But for a litel speche avysely
Is no man shent, to speke generally.
My sone, thy tonge sholdestow restreyne
At alle tymes, but whan thou doost thy peyne
To speke of God, in honour and preyere.

The
Maunciples
Tale